



**sweet  
trepidation**

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## **sweet trepidation by Motunui**

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**Summary:**

In which Eddie has grown so accustomed to checking over his shoulder, he cannot accept peace. Richie does his best to aid him in doing so.

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When Eddie vacates the field beside the river bank, the flesh of his ankles itching from where the unkempt grass has irritated it, he feels astray. He doesn't even care about the blood which paints his palms, which is now beginning to crust and fade from angry crimson to a copper brown. The thought nags his mind, as he turns onto his street, that it can't really be over. He's spent weeks having to check over his shoulder every other moment, for fear of being followed, of being preyed upon. He's spent so long playing the quarry being hunted, that freedom still feels like the light at the end of some fictitious tunnel he's pretending he's yet to emerge from. It's too good to be true, in the literal sense.

He doesn't notice that Richie has been chasing him until he's at his side, clawing excitedly at his shoulder and singing his name. At first, he doesn't respond, too caught up in his own thoughts. Richie appears to pick up on this immediately.

“What's up with *you*?” Notably, his pace has slowed, and he now walks with leisure beside his best friend. Eddie flinches, finally tearing his gaze away from his sneakers to glance at the other loser.

“Nothing!” He replies, somewhat defensive. Richie's brows fly upwards behind his thick glasses.

“Cut the crap, Eds.”

Eddie heaves a melodramatic sigh, because he knows that Hell would freeze over before Richie will drop a conversation he's not satisfied with. He shrugs, picking uncomfortably at his cast. “I'm just wary of the fact that we might be getting way ahead of ourselves and – you know, we shouldn't be complacent.” He answers finally. Silence settles between the pair as they walk, presumably to allow Richie time to process what Eddie is talking about.

“Are you talking about the fucking clown?” Richie presses, blinking at his friend in bewilderment. Eddie simply nods, blushing. He feels a bit stupid now, like Richie is judging him for his

suspicions, though they don't budge. Richie scrunches his nose. "It's *gone*. We kicked that son-of-a-bitch's *ass*. It's *gone*," he pauses, debating on whether to continue. Eddie watches him expectantly, because he knows what he's going to say, "For now, at least."

Though Eddie has been pondering the matter for hours now, the words his friend speaks force a shiver down his spine. He *knows* what Richie means; years. Decades even. Eddie, however, can't shake the feeling that the demon's return is imminent. That he'll be greeted into his own home by the very being who had haunted him and his friends for weeks. That he'll awaken in the night, torn limb from limb. His inner torment must be readable on his features, because Richie reluctantly slings an arm around his hunched shoulders. He's leaning closer, his face practically nuzzling Eddie's hair.

"We're fine, Eds. We're safe now." He cooed, though Eddie is honestly feeling no less tense than he had been whilst walking alone, moments earlier. His blatant apprehension causes Richie to rock away from him, pursing his lips and staring at his sneakers as he traipsed alongside him. Of course, he can't keep his mouth shut for too long, and is soon insisting that he accompanies his friend home, because they can play on the NES, or something. Reluctantly, Eddie obliges.

He doesn't bother addressing his mother when the pair arrive home – their relationship has been a rocky one ever since he walked out. From his peripheral vision, it almost looks like she's ready to shuffle out of her armchair when he passes the living room doorway, but she doesn't. He thinks she doesn't dare. Not because he'll lash out, but because he'll make to leave again – and perhaps not return. For now, Eddie's satisfied with this arrangement; he has nothing to say to her for now.

It's almost awkward when they reach his room. For Eddie, at least. He perches at the foot of his bed whilst Richie sprawls his limbs across the sheets, elongating a sigh as he does so. Eddie steals a glance at his friend, an air of newfound tension consuming him. He doesn't know how to act, now that they're not scheming to vanquish the clown. Life suddenly feels a lot more monotone, in the worst way. Maybe there's something wrong with him, he thinks briefly.

“Jesus, I feel like I’m in a film noir.” Richie is staring blankly at the ceiling as he speaks, his tone flat. Eddie wishes he had some ingenious remark to reciprocate with, but he doesn’t, because he could never amount to Richie’s wit. He’d sooner suffocate than voice this to him, though. Instead, he reclines against the mattress, his head positioned inches from his friend’s. He tilts it to once again gaze at the other, chewing his lower lip as he ponders absently.

“Thanks, by the way.” He says quietly, carefully. Richie shifts to rest his head in his hands, squinting at Eddie with interest.

“For what?”

“Being here, I guess.” Eddie murmurs, “I don’t know where my head’s at, at the moment.”

The confession sounds frighteningly mature to Richie’s ears. He can’t tear his gaze away from those brown eyes – wistful as they stare back at him. He surveys the boy’s expression carefully, relinquishing the one-hundred-and-one facetious remarks which surface in his mind and instead noting the mauve blotches which accent his eye sockets. With grief, he suspects that Eddie’s sleeping pattern – which had once been a rigorously maintained routine – has been forsaken. A picture lingers like a fever in his mind, one of Eddie Kaspbrak lying awake with only the haunting echoes of the past few weeks to serve as his lullaby.

Richie recalls the countless nights of October in which he’d close his eyes, only to have the ghastly face of Pennywise imprinted on the back of his eyelids. The thought of his best friend sharing the same experience strikes a pain in his gut. Without a moment’s thought, he intertwines his fingers with Eddie’s, shifting clumsily closer so that they’re shoulder-to-shoulder. “We’ll get through this, Eds. It’ll get better, and we’ll be okay.”

Eddie proffers an appreciative smile and reluctantly lays his cheek against Richie’s shoulder. His eyes flutter shut, and he decides to give sleep a chance.